

BMR: Reflection on the concept of 'fairmindedness' in critical thinking as explored in Reading 2.

To be honest, I am puzzled as to what 'fairmindedness' has to do with this reading.

I understand the comparison b/w 'Western individualist approaches to critical thinking & problem solving' and the collectivist approach more imbued with 'traditional' cultural values. I found it intensely interesting. At first, I thought 'I don't agree with the 'accept it as it is' approach of the Yin/Yang balance & Good & Evil especially when it comes to Science & the application of scientific problem solving techniques to technological & for example environmental problems.

Then I thought 'hang on a minute!' There is <sup>very strong</sup> an emphasis for consulting native traditional ~~people~~ peoples in the management of environmental resources in particular, and balancing that with the 'current modern scientific approach'!

Two cases in point: ① Watway / Landline → management of watway in Australia - consult traditional Aboriginal tribes to ask for their advice & on the best management strategies & ... widely accepted

② The prevalence of the modern, carbohydrate diet which has in all likelihood led to the prevalence of Type II Diabetes along with the rise in Cardiovascular disease & other syndromes which did not plague Native populations until Western influence / diet was



## INDIVIDUALIST AND COLLECTIVIST CULTURES

One useful way of describing differences between cultures involves the concepts of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 1998). Although individuals as well as cultures possess both individualistic and collectivistic tendencies to varying degrees, examining the distinctions between these cultural dimensions offers insight about the cultural frameworks that influence how people reason.

Individualistic cultures, such as Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany, and the United States, esteem the person as an individual. These cultures foster an autonomous self—a sense of each person as unique and separate from others—and emphasize independence, self-determination and self-reliance to achieve personal goals (Mpofu, 1994; Triandis et al., 1998; Watkins, Mortazavi, & Trofimova, 2000). In individualistic cultures, self-esteem is derived from what a person does or accomplishes. Although acting within social contexts, individualists' achievements are attributed to their own traits and choices, apart from relational or contextual matters. Focused on their plans, individualists' personal goals take priority over the goals of in-groups such as the family. Since individualism reinforces detachment from others, each person is largely emotionally disconnected from in-groups. Therefore, individualist cultures rely upon personal guilt for social control rather than shame or other social norms of conformity (Triandis, 1995; Watkins et al., 2000).

Individualism fosters a "low-context" communication style, which values direct self-expression, clarity, and speaking one's mind freely in a climate of competitiveness. Regardless of context, individualist communicators are expected to be verbally explicit, specific, and direct (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Neuliep, 2000). Considerable information is sought to direct the communication process, minimizing uncertainty and ambiguity. Individualists' messages include more self-referents such as "I" than other-referents such as "we" (Dodd, 1998).

Collectivistic cultures, such as Africa, China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Thailand, or Native American cultures, foster a sense of the self as interrelated and interdependent with others (Ho, 1998; Moemeka, 1998; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Triandis, 1995). Goals and values that serve the in-group (the family, neighborhood, or community) are stressed along with mutual obligations and shared responsibility. Concepts of self and others are seen not as separate from, but as molded by, ongoing social contexts: "I am because we are" (Moemeka, 1998, p. 125). Harmony, social

reciprocity, obligation, dependence, and obedience are dominant values (Triandis, 1995).

Moemeka (1998) summarizes five characteristics that communal cultures share: (a) supremacy of the community; (b) sanctity of authority and hierarchy; (c) usefulness of the individual; (d) respect for the elderly; and (e) religion as a way of life. Collectivists are emotionally connected to their in-group through shared beliefs and values. Self-esteem is derived from maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships while adapting to changing situations. Violating group harmony may be punished, often by shame.

Members of collectivistic cultures are expected to listen and infer the speaker's intention from what is not explicitly said (Ng, Loong, He, Liu, & Weatherall, 2000). Relying upon the context for communication cues is possible because members know each other and are expected to be sensitive to their respective social roles in varying contexts. Less reliance upon verbal communication and heightened use of nonverbal cues, as well as indirectness, ambiguity, and silence are therefore possible and valued. "Saving face" (avoiding criticism or the appearance of disagreement) is essential to help maintain harmony (Ng et al., 2000). This "high-context" communication is receiver-oriented. Sender and receiver focus on and are sensitive to each other. For example, "the Japanese value catching on quickly to another's meaning before the other must completely express the thought verbally or logically" (Ramsey, 1979, p. 142).

The features of individualistic and collective cultures remind us that, although we should not overemphasize differences, neither should we presume that other cultures share identical ways of knowing, being, and valuing (Banks, 1995, 1997). "Rather, the collectivistic mode has been more representative by far throughout the ages and in diverse parts of the world. In Chinese societies, for instance, the family, and not the individual, has been regarded as the basic social unit since ancient times" (Ho, 1998, p. 99). Wong & Tjosvold (1992) note that Chinese-Confucian culture values filial piety, emphasizing respect and obedience to parents, collective interdependence of people, and a code of conduct that guides appropriate behavior in view of people's hierarchical positions.

The Sioux (Native American) culture exemplifies a collectivist social order. The pervasive role of kinship is reflected in the Dakota/Lakota/Nakota salutation and prayer, "Mitakuye Oyasin," or "We are all related." This saying expresses the intimate connection they feel with others and the universe, reflecting their social identity and civic obligations to their rela-

*Practical work - designing an experiment*

*Asian culture - just do as the right answer*

*Guilt vs Shame*

*Why don't you say*

*what you really think?*

*Regurgitate*

*VS*

*What would happen if*

*Applying to a situation*

*understand the context principle*



tions (Brenner & Hoag, 1998). This sense of kinship, with accompanying appropriate attitudes and behaviors, developed in the dynamics of their demographics and the struggle to survive, and is intrinsically grounded in their spirituality (Bryde, 1970).

In Lakota culture, kinship changes the context of decision making and problem solving by emphasizing the responsibility members feel for each other and sensitizing them to the consequences of their behavior upon others. Civility and discipline are required; members must control their impulse to argue or disagree, both internally and externally. Deloria notes that "a socially responsible Dakota might not thoughtlessly indulge his moods, lest there be within range of his voice or presence a relative before whom his feelings must be suppressed as a matter of obligatory respect" (1983, p. 21). Moreover, silence is also highly valued because it encourages thorough, reflective, respectful, and deep listening in social exchanges. In varying ways, communal cultures cultivate those ways of communicating and thinking that inwardly and outwardly reflect thoughtful and behavioral regard for others, maintaining social harmony.

### CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Differences in values, patterns of communication, and thinking dispositions in individualist and collectivist cultures influence the purposes, conduct, and standards for good thinking when one forms critical judgments or solves problems. Individualistic societies encourage direct, unambiguous statements. In Western culture, critical thinking and solving problems are intellectual tasks that each individual carries out independently, yielding consequences for which one usually is solely responsible. Thinking in various collectivistic cultures is socialized across group members. Communal cultures highlight the social dimension of thinking, a necessary dependence upon the informational and experiential resources offered by others. Thinking is not an entirely solitary activity but is strengthened through communication with others and through assessment and correction.

Paul and colleagues (1997) consider clarity as the "gateway" standard—a fundamental criterion to facilitate critical thinking, which may involve disagreement, correction, self-expression, or verbalization of one's inner beliefs and opinions, and may assume the importance of openly changing things or situations. However, communal cultures, in which saving face is paramount, find ambiguity and indirection essential to maintaining harmonious relationships. Argumentation and persuasion are devalued because they suggest that one has superior knowledge or that others must be corrected or con-

verted, potentially creating ill will or disharmony. Private conversations or intermediaries may be employed carefully in cases of significant disagreement; public forums are not considered appropriate venues for self-expression.

Critical thinking is characterized as utilitarian, focusing on dominating, controlling and computing information while seeking definite, unambiguous, and objective results and knowledge (Hvolbek, 1992). Accuracy is espoused as a standard to assess and uphold the value of critical thinking (Costa & Kallick, 2000; Paul et al., 1997). Yet accuracy or eliminating errors may enjoy less currency in those communal cultures where maintaining social harmony and respecting the wisdom of the group or elders is valued more highly.

In individualistic cultures, critical thinking tends to involve a strategy, a process of asking and answering with evidence the key questions that thoughtful people satisfy before making certain judgments. Swartz and Parks (1994) describe a five-step decision-making strategy: determine whether a decision is necessary; consider a number of options; gather information to predict each option's likelihood of positive and negative consequences; evaluate the importance of likely consequences; and choose the best option based on their significance. This approach reflects an individualist perspective that values thorough, systematic thought, inferences of likelihood, and prioritizing of values. In many collectivistic cultures, a more desired process would be to consider an issue carefully, frame a question, approach a wise elder for advice, and ponder it before making a thoughtful choice. If an issue is decided in a group forum, discourse may express many similar factors, but not through a step-wise, organized strategy.

Problem posing may vary across cultures. Individualist, action-oriented cultures presume the value of solving problems and doing things. A "problem" is often perceived as a barrier or negative condition to be overcome or abated, prompting a plan or device to accomplish a desired goal or outcome. However, in collectivist cultures one typically may accept things or situations as they are and simply "not enter into the problem-solving frame of mind" (Larson, 2001, p. 192). "In the traditional way, trying to control things or people is considered a waste of energy because it is believed that everything is as it should be at any given point in time. . . . Acceptance is a very important part of living in harmony and balance in a world view that emphasizes that everyone and everything has a reason for being" (Garrett & Wilbur, 1999, pp. 198–199).

Individualistic cultures may focus on short-term goals such as scoring a point, making oneself understood, winning an argument, or abating a problem. However, in collectivistic cultures, decision making involves considering long-term conse-

*Asian cultures  
- is questioning teachers  
acceptable?*



quences that must be especially carefully weighed in terms of how decisions could affect the larger community. The Lakota, for instance, are exhorted to consider a decision's possible effect on "the seventh generation" from the present one.

Many cultures, including Native Americans, typically value holistic rather than analytical types of thinking. They view all things as connected and think in terms of general principles or seeing the big picture (see Gilliland, 1995; Lame Deer, Archie Fire, & Erdoes, 1992). In Chinese culture, dialectic tensions that Western thinkers see as opposites—for example, good versus evil and right versus wrong—are seen instead as complementary. The yin and yang illustrate not simply opposites, but the balance or harmony of the whole—the unity of the two (Chen, 1998). Ho (1998) draws attention to the Filipino concept of "pakapa-kapa," or groping, as a general way of problem solving that encourages approaching problems with no preconceived notions or questions, as a blank slate, "as if one were in a state of total ignorance" (p. 97). This approach, grounded in a sense of shared identity and connection with others, is similar to what Hvolbek (1992) describes as a meditative type of thinking, developing full awareness of the moment, and avoiding analysis and categorization, while being fully present and passively contemplative rather than actively investigative.

All cultures rely upon information, but data and credible sources may be defined differently. In Western culture evidence is drawn from scientific research, experts and authorities, or books. In collective cultures, wise elders—referred to by the Lakota as "living libraries of knowledge"—are sources of information. In oral cultures, decision making is informed by stories prized for reflecting the values and wisdom of generations (a coded wisdom). Polynesian navigators developed keen sensitivity and accuracy in reading patterns in seemingly unrelated signs, information that Western science traditionally regarded as chaotic (Witt-Miller, 1991). Meadows explains that American Indian traditions derived from "knowledge of the pulsating rhythm of life that could be seen and sensed all around in the Book of Nature, in the chapters of the seasonal cycles, in the passages of the Sun and the Moon, and whose words could be found among the trees and plants and animals and birds" (1996, p. 13).

The purposes and outcomes of critical thinking and problem solving also vary with culture. The desired result of critical thinking and problem solving in Western culture is well-founded knowledge or judgment. Degree of certainty, warranted inferences, and practical effectiveness are standards by which we judge whether thinking is sound. The intelligence modality favored in Western cultures focuses upon recalling,

classifying, analyzing, or applying knowledge. Limited by the contexts in which it operates, this modality seeks efficiency, prediction, and control through logical, analytical reasoning and simple solutions (Hanna, Bemak, & Chung, 1999).

Collectivist cultures not only value group kinship; they cultivate spiritual wisdom as well. Hanna and colleagues (1999) define wisdom as the cognitive and affective traits reinforcing "life skills and understanding necessary for living a life of well-being, fulfillment, effective coping, and insight into the nature of self, others, environment, and interpersonal interactions" (p. 126). They argue that wisdom promotes an extraordinary holistic and affective "depth, fluidity, and richness of understanding" (p. 131), including awareness of its own limits and origins through dialectic, experiential and transcendent reasoning that accommodates ambiguity.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Since American education is based strongly on Western structures of knowledge and epistemology, individualist modes of critical thinking and decision making will remain the dominant thinking practices in schools. Students' academic achievement and understanding of important curriculum concepts and principles require thoughtful analysis and well-informed evaluation.

Adding collectivist decision-making practices to students' thinking repertoires addresses each of Banks's suggested five dimensions of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure (1995). Curriculum content should include awareness that different cultures solve problems differently and that historical events and literary works are influenced by the intellectual dispositions of the culture in which they occur. Banks's notion of "the knowledge construction process" is closely linked to the practice of critical thinking and encourages divergent or expansive thinking. Collectivist decision making offers experiential techniques to show how events, issues, or concepts can be viewed from many points of view and arrived at by various ways of knowing.

Collectivist decision making employs social and emotional interactions that are promoted in the current interest in emotional intelligence. It provides techniques for prejudice reduction, creates a school culture of civility and respect, and offers students from collectivist culture families some school experiences that resemble their own cultural styles.

Enhancing critical thinking and problem solving across cultures requires educators to understand standards of good

Include reference to Aboriginal Peoples & Western Peoples

Knowledge gained & handed down over 60,000 yrs of culture.  
Can science know everything? → teach students value & cultural knowledge

Aboriginal has wisdom and understanding - Elders to be consulted re environmental problem & medicinal value of plants & environmental weather patterns



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As for the affective aspects of problem solving - I think all educators would benefit / & ∴ all students would benefit from a greater willingness to take responsibility for each other & to hear each other with respect & civility, and enhance our ability to LISTEN to each other.

I love the idea of being able to use the accumulated wealth of knowledge, wisdom & experience of any community's elders especially being able to imbue a modern individualistic student a renewed respect for their elders.

Very thought provoking whole & particularly well written.